A Marshall Cavendish Publication 35 In Fortnightly Parts

The Ancestral Trail

Cyber Challenge in the Next Dimension

35 Identico, Deadly Replicator

Lost in the factory of dreams

Judge Heller

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The voyage through the worm hole seemed to last an eternity. As Richard and Robo hurtled through the brightly lit vortex, they could do nothing to resist its inexorable pull. Then, in the blink of an eye, their enforced journey was suddenly over.

Still sitting atop the cyber cruiser, the pair emerged from the mouth of the strange tunnel to find themselves floating in a dense, inky blackness. Behind Richard, the humming of Robo's internal circuits could be heard. Before he had time to take in his new surroundings, Richard noticed something else. He realized that he seemed to be covered by a thin, translucent bubble. He reached out to touch it but the voice of Robo stopped him.

Life saving bubble

"Have created temporary force field," explained the robot. "Limited air supply within will protect Chosen One from effects of vacuum."

"Vacuum? How can that be?" Richard exclaimed.

A look below the cruiser provided an answer to the question. The flying machine and its passengers had emerged from the worm hole to find themselves hovering close to the surface of a strange planet.

Richard stared in confusion at the planet's pock-marked surface beneath him. It seemed only moments ago that he and Robo had been standing on the shores of the toxic river. Now everything had changed. The skies had been replaced by a desolate darkness.

Except for a ghostly pallor cast by the gigantic worm hole that had brought them here, the only light that could be seen came from the occasional flickering of a clutch of distant stars.

"Where are we, Robo?" Richard asked.

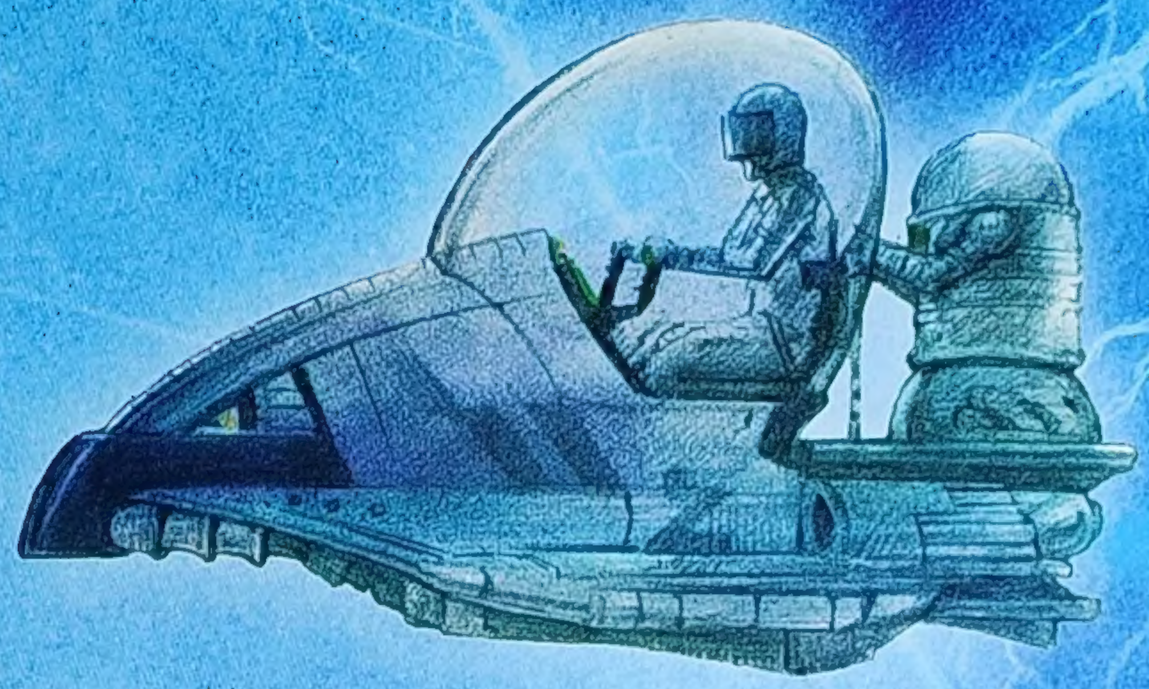
The robot pondered the question.

"Current position indeterminate," he finally said. "Sensors indicate we are traversing surface of minor planetary body. Larger planetary body in nearby orbit."

Richard looked around and immediately understood his companion's diagnosis. He watched with interest as a small globe slowly began to rise above the curving horizon. Blackened and charred, it hung in the sky like a battered old tennis ball.

New discovery

Then something else caught Richard's attention. At first he thought it must be a trick of the light. He shook his head but the image before him would not go away.



"Robo!" he excitedly said. "Do you see what I see?"

"To obtain answer to question, Chosen One must be more precise," was the robot's deadpan response.

"Pyramids!" Richard shouted. "Look, in the distance – I can see pyramids!"

In his excitement over the latest discovery, Richard had failed to notice that the planet had suddenly begun to get lighter. The grey and forbidding landscape of a few moments ago was now illuminated by a pure white glow. A rumble from above brought Richard back to his senses. Without warning, the skies erupted in a blaze of violent colour.

"Danger!" Robo called above the din. "Electrical storm. Must seek shelter!"

Forked lightning danced around the cyber cruiser as Richard pulled back the joystick and steered the flying machine in the direction of the pyramids. Blinding whip cracks of electricity lashed into the ground and Richard's skin tickled in the charged air as the force field rippled.

Without any air resistance, the cruiser reached the safety of the triangular buildings in double quick time. "Cannot sustain force field," Robo warned. "Must enter pyramid as soon as possible."

Richard looked in vain for a doorway to safety.

"Opening situated at base of triangular construction," came Robo's calm monotone. Richard looked downwards and could see a small rectangular recess set in the wall of the pyramid.

"How do we get in?" Richard asked.

The robot did not answer. Instead, his digital speakers emitted a high-pitched series of bleeps.

"Robo, look!" Richard shouted. "It's opening!"

"Pyramid entrance password decoded," Robo said.

Richard carefully guided the cruiser through the opening. It was a tight fit. For a moment, Richard thought that the machine would be too big. He heaved a sigh of relief when they finally made it through.

As they landed, an airlock closed behind them and an inner door slid open. Dismounting the cruiser, they entered

"Atmosphere now suitable for Chosen One to breathe," Robo proclaimed, but Richard was not listening.

"Robo, look at this. Did you ever see anything so beautiful?" he cried, eagerly walking forward.

THE GARDEN OF UNEARTHLY DELIGHTS

They had stepped into a luxuriant garden, filled with strange and exotic plants. Sunlight poured down from a deep blue sky and, although Richard knew there could not really be a sun or a sky inside the pyramid, the thickly-growing green plants filled him with happiness. "It's like a giant greenhouse," he smiled.

Robo trundled wearily behind Richard. Maintaining the air-filled force field had almost exhausted the squat little robot's electrical energy reserves.

By contrast, Richard felt his tiredness and fright slip away as he walked, feasting his eyes on the scenery and breathing in the fresh air.

Then Richard shouted with excitement, "A pagoda! Come on, Robo, let's see if there's anything inside." Without waiting for a reply, he ran on ahead.

Robo hesitated for an instant before following. A new binary message had appeared on his screen, but Richard was too excited to notice.

Thick vines hung in great loops and swags from the different levels of the structure. Richard pushed some of the plants aside and peered behind them. "I think it's solid, Robo. What do you suppose it's for?"

Instead of answering him, the robot turned his heat ray on the closest vine and blasted it with full power.

THE STEEL WITHIN

Richard gasped in astonishment. Where the heat ray struck, the leaves and creepers were melting. Underneath, a metal framework could be seen.

"The leaves are just plastic – but they looked so real!" he exclaimed, in shock.

As the words left his lips, a vine whipped out from behind Robo, pinning the robot's

metallic arms to his body casing. This was followed by more vines. They grabbed him and lifted him into the air. Robo's heat ray flickered as he struggled in their powerful grasp.

Before Richard could do anything to help his metal friend, he too was caught in the steely grip of the living vines. He and Robo were passed from vine to vine up the sides of the pagoda.

"Robo, what is going on?" he shouted desperately, as the pair were helplessly dragged ever higher.

"Inhabitants of garden are Replitypes," answered the robot, his mechanical voice unmoved by the bumping and shaking. "Replitypes are mechanical copies of organic beings. Created by replicator known as Identico."

The vines relaxed their grip and the two rolled over and over. Shaken and bruised, Richard checked that Robo was all right and then stood up and looked about him.

They had reached the uppermost level of the pagoda. Squatting in the centre was an extraordinary creature. With a bulbous head lined with white veins, and a pair of shining black eyes, it exuded menace.

Coiling out from its body were gnarled creepers connected to bulbous pods. The sides of the pods rippled, as though something inside was trying to escape.

"Identico, I presume?" Richard said politely, keeping a hand on his sword.

Quivering with excitement the replicator turned to face him.

"Perfect. Perfect," it muttered, in a voice that sounded creaky from disuse. "Just what I need – a genuine carbon-based organism."

"What do you mean, just what you need?" Richard asked.

A look of anxiety crossed Identico's veined features, "Are you not carbon-based?"

"Well, yes I am," Richard replied, cautiously. "What use am I to you?"

Identico swayed irritably. "You have seen my work? The garden, the birds and flowers? Those are not the only forms I can recreate. My prime directive is to replicate the dominant species on every known world and dimension."

Richard was about to ask why but Robo's voice broke in.

"Replicator's function is to create Replitypes. Replitypes' function is to obey Replicator's commands."

A HUMAN TEMPLATE

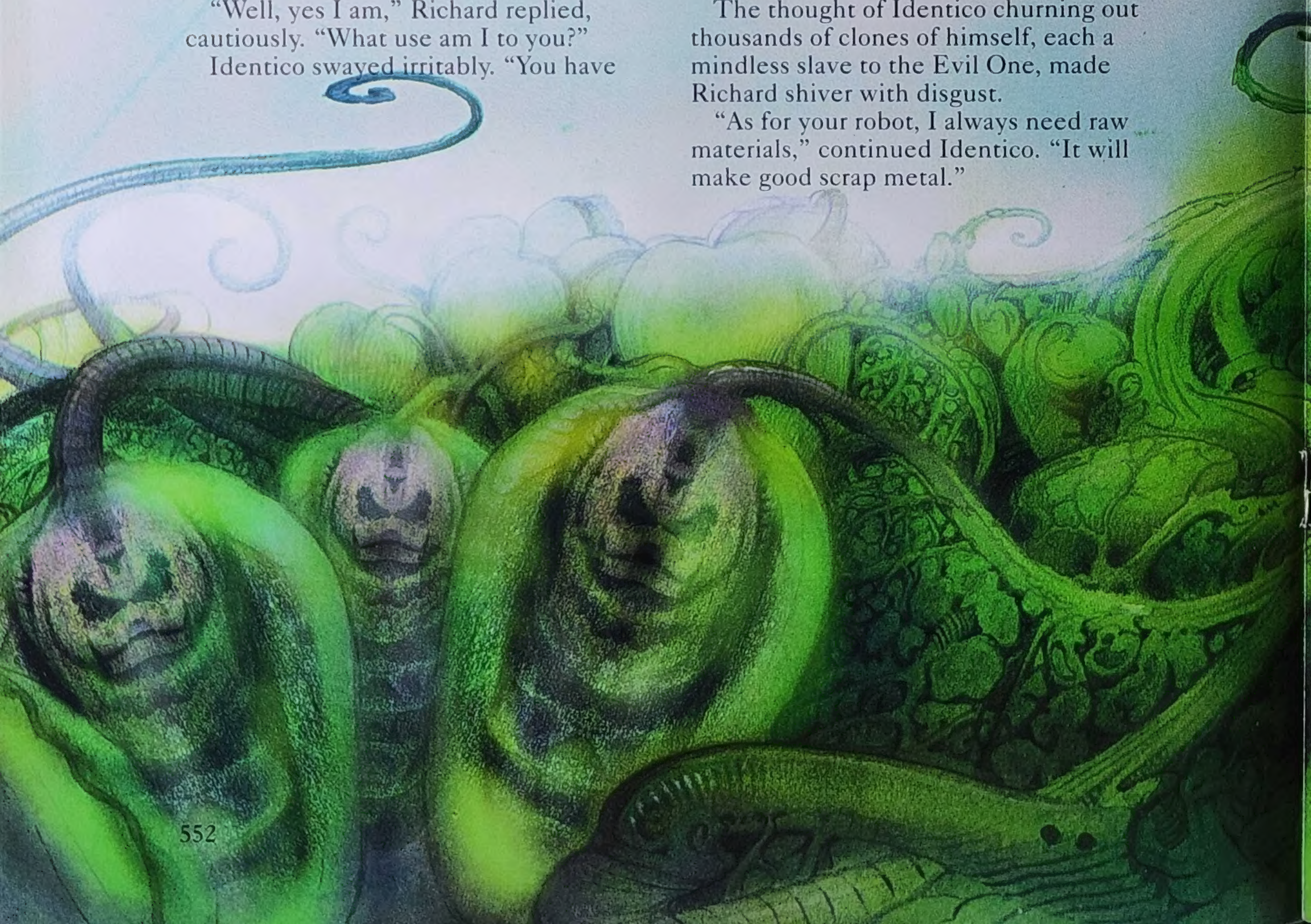
"My humanoid Replitypes are mere toys, not true organic beings," the replicator growled. "They are mindless and they wear out too quickly. I need organic body cells for a pattern." The creature stared intently at Richard.

"Do you mean that you want to copy me?" Richard gasped.

"That is correct – you will make perfect source material."

The thought of Identico churning out thousands of clones of himself, each a mindless slave to the Evil One, made Richard shiver with disgust.

"As for your robot, I always need raw materials," continued Identico. "It will make good scrap metal."



The massive creeper lying nearest Richard twitched. With smooth power it rose from the ground and wrapped itself around his leg. He drew his sword and hacked at it, but the blade simply bounced off the skin of tough rubbery plastic covering the steel core.

Richard felt compact motors buzzing efficiently inside the synthetic branch as its grip tightened. He looked at Robo and saw that a new message had appeared on the robot's binary panel. In desperation, he began to decode the message.

Dust cloud

"Of course!" Richard exclaimed in triumph. "Identico's a machine, but he's covered in a green skin. He must be solar powered, like real plants."

"Robo!" he yelled, "Can you block out the sunlight?"

Robo's panel lights flashed. His dumpy body lifted itself high in

the air and extruded two small tail jets.

Powerful bursts of air blasted down, sending up a great column of dust. Identico thrashed his limbs and his motors screamed as he tried to knock Robo to the ground.

Richard's plan was already working. The robot had created a huge, choking dust cloud that blotted out the sunlight and settled in a thick coat on the Replicator's green skin.

The shrill sound of Identico's motors gradually fell in pitch and Richard felt the grip of the creepers about his body slowly loosen. At last the sound died away altogether and Identico slumped into silent motionlessness.

However, Richard was not yet out of danger.

The strange looking pods that had been scattered all around Identico began to shake frantically. One by one they burst open and from their broken shells emerged Identico's Replitypes.

The fearsome teeth glittered as they moved towards Richard. He had destroyed their master and they were desperate to avenge him.

REPLITYPES' REVENGE

Robo switched off his air jets and landed beside Richard.

"Replitypes do not need sunlight to function. Advise Chosen One to leave area."

Richard looked at the aimlessly milling crowd of reptilian clones. They turned their scaly heads to stare in his direction and a hoarse grunting could be heard.

"Let's move it, Robo," he agreed.

The robot rolled smoothly towards the edge of the pagoda, where the grasping vines now hung as limply as Identico. Richard was about to follow when a sound made him turn his head.

"Robo! Run!" he screamed. The robot's movement had attracted the attention of the Replitypes. Stumbling and lurching on unsteady legs, the crowd of predatory clones rushed down upon them in a roaring tidal wave of jerking limbs.

Richard flung himself at the nearest vine. Hand over hand he descended the side of the pagoda. Robo's heat ray fired out repeatedly to cover his escape.

When he touched the ground, Richard wasted no time in looking about him for an escape route. "We'll have to go back the way we came!" he said.

Behind them bounded the screaming army of Replitypes.

Richard glanced over his shoulder at the grinning faces of his pursuers and put on an extra burst of speed.

As they dashed towards the inner wall of the pyramid, Richard could clearly make out the sliding door of the air lock.

"You'll have to open it again!" he called to his companion.

Robo's lights flashed as he scanned the door's mechanism. Then the robot once again gave a series of electronic beeps and the door slid open just as Richard reached it. He dived through and landed rolling on the floor with Robo hovering closely beside him.

The door slid shut again, but a handful of Replitypes had squeezed through the gap. With outstretched hands, and eyes that gazed at nothing, they advanced.

Into the skies

As Richard grabbed the handle of the outer door, he felt the familiar prickle of Robo's protective force field. Then they were through, the Replitypes still on their heels. The force field flashed and fizzed where the flailing limbs of their attackers beat against it.

"They don't understand the force field," Richard panted, as he flung himself aboard the waiting cyber cruiser, "I don't think they can even feel pain."

"Replitypes may damage cyber cruiser. Advise Chosen One to leave area," responded Robo calmly.

Holding tightly on to the controls, Richard hurled the cyber cruiser into the air. In moments, they had broken free of the clutching hands and the scarred surface of the planet fell away below them.

Richard steadied the cyber cruiser and peered over the side. Below them the curving landscape stretched away in every direction as far as he could see. Nothing interrupted its cratered horizon except the group of dully gleaming pyramids from which they had so narrowly escaped.

"What do we do now, Robo?" he asked. "How do we get away from this place?"

World in a balloon

The robot clicked, hummed and spun his head from side to side. "Scanning for planet exit," he said finally.

"Can your sensors find the entrance to the worm hole again?" Richard asked.

"Worm hole no longer open. Scanning to find alternative exit," replied Robo as his sensors swept the surrounding space.

"Scan complete," he announced abruptly. "Gateway directly ahead. Maximum acceleration required."

Richard could see nothing ahead except a star-filled sky but he did as he was told.

Suddenly, the cruiser hit something. There was an explosion of bright red light and the flying machine was sent spinning out of control.

"What's happening, Robo?" Richard shouted, as he struggled to keep the cyber cruiser steady.

With another deafening crack of sound, the cyber cruiser bounded forward. Behind them the starry black spacescape shrank away and vanished.

"Escape successful," Robo loudly proclaimed.

DIGITAL DANGER

Richard twisted around in his seat, open-mouthed. The stars, the planets, the whole contents of the strange world they had been trapped inside was rushing away from them like a collapsed balloon.

"Dimensional walls pierced by cyber cruiser," Robo informed him. "Normal atmosphere regained. Lowering emergency force field."

They were now flying through an area of cool blue light. In the distance something could be seen moving towards them.

"That's weird," Richard said, pointing at the objects. "They look like numbers."

SHOOMI'S SANCTUARY

Enter into the Cyber Dimension and engage optical recognition to find...

▶ Shoomi and Shoobi

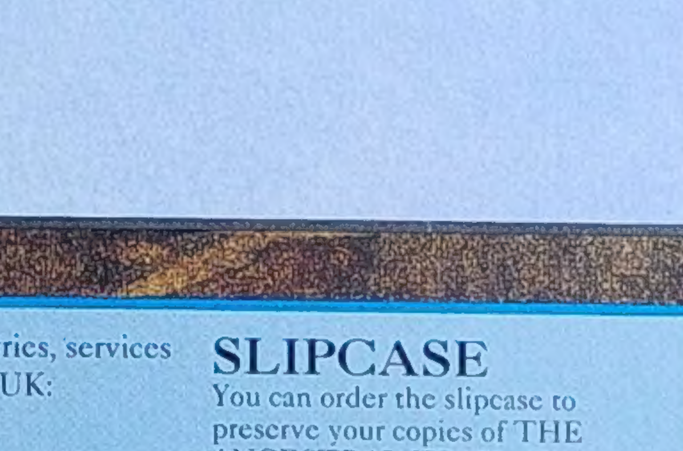
The two tiny comrades are staying close to Richard through every difficulty and danger he encounters. Can you spot them somewhere in the lunar world in under three minutes?

In issue 34 Shoomi and Shoobi were on page 534.

▶ Computer Challenge

Hidden somewhere in this issue is a vitally important computer component from the sinister Cyber Dimension. Use your visual skills to help Richard and his friend Robo locate it in less than three minutes.
When you have discovered the component's hiding place, can you guess what it is and what its function might be?

In the last issue, a computer keyboard was hidden on page 533. The keyboard is the operator's main method of communicating with the computer. Each key generates a separate code which is transmitted to the computer when a key is pressed.



▶ Competition Details

In each issue you will find letter blocks. Cut these out and keep them safe. When you have collected 26, you will be given a clue which will help you form them into a sentence that reveals the fatal flaw in the Cyber Dimension. Competition details will appear in later issues.
NB The competition will be open to residents of UK and Eire only.

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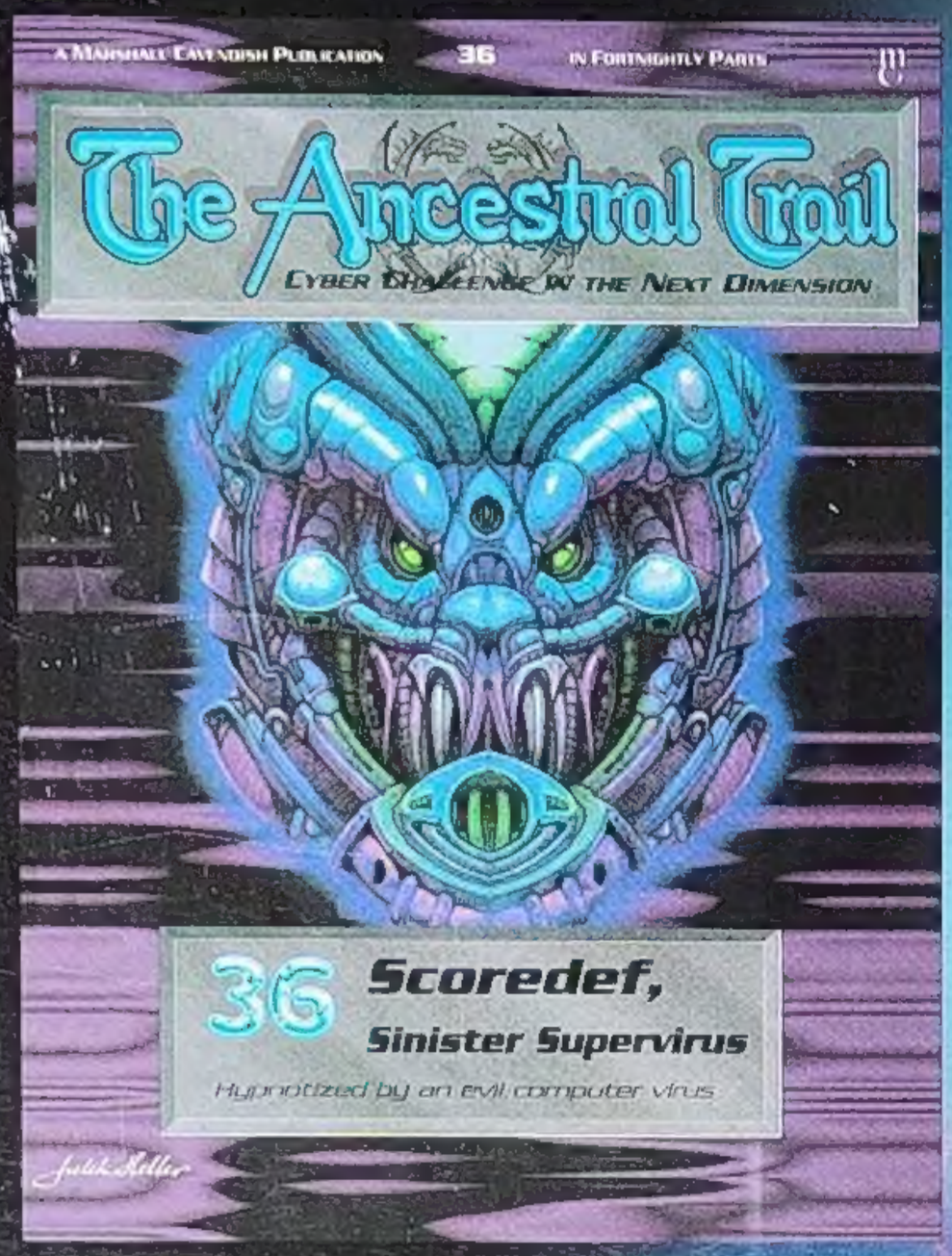

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Scoredef,

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At the heart of the Cyber Dimension, Richard must repel the challenge of a deadly living computer virus.

plus

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